

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 25, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

Over a century ago, the Congress afforded the President unique authority under the Antiquities Act to protect certain public lands that have significant natural, cultural and scientific value. Since that time, sixteen presidents from both parties have used the Act to designate a total of 157 national monuments, protecting iconic American landscapes, such as the Grand Canyon, and historic landmarks, such as the Statue of Liberty and the birthplace of George Washington, for future generations. These treasured landscapes and cultural and historic landmarks are woven into the fabric of our country.

That is why we are deeply troubled by the President's April 26th executive order establishing a process that could lead to the diminishment or outright repeal of national monuments designated by his predecessors. It is unconscionable to think that this Administration would sell out America's outdoor heritage to benefit corporate interests in the oil, gas, and mining industries.

In establishing the Antiquities Act and through its repeated use, the Congress and past Presidents recognized that there are certain places too special to be spoiled by industrial development or commercial use. We recognized then, as we do now, that our society benefits from protecting these special places in perpetuity, to be enjoyed by current and future generations. National monuments are critical to the telling of our nation's story and are enjoyed by Americans of all ages to hike, hunt and fish.

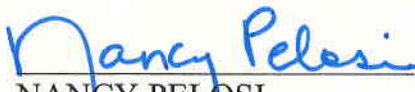
Inherent in the establishment of the Antiquities Act in 1906 is one important truth: protecting America's outdoor heritage and making use of America's abundant natural resources on our public lands are not mutually exclusive goals. Millions of acres of public lands are and remain open for commercial activity while certain areas warrant protection from those activities. The Antiquities Act focuses on protecting those public lands that cannot nor should not be touched by extractive industries.

Many of the monuments under threat from the President's executive order tell important stories from countless Americans who have helped shape our rich cultural history. Some of those sites are considered sacred by Native Americans, including Bears Ears in Utah and Chimney Rock in Colorado. Other monuments mark the significant contributions African Americans have made to our great nation, including Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers in Ohio, Pullman in Illinois, and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad in Maryland. Cesar Chavez in California and Stonewall in New York recognize important landmarks for America's Latino and LGBT communities, respectively.


As public servants, we have a moral obligation to protect America's natural places – our outdoor heritage – and important cultural and historic landmarks for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. For these reasons, we urge you to reject any attempt to diminish or eliminate national monuments in carrying out the President's executive order.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


NANCY PELOSI
House Democratic Leader


CHARLES E. SCHUMER
Senate Democratic Leader


STENY H. HOYER
House Democratic Whip


RICHARD J. DURBIN
Senate Democratic Whip